



**State Representatives
John Patterson & Sheehy**

House Bill 460
Sponsor Testimony
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
January 30, 2018

Rep. Patterson:

Chairman Landis, Vice-Chair Hagan, Ranking Member O'Brien, and distinguished members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 460.

Our hope is that HB 460 will play a significant role in curtailing agricultural runoff in the Western Basin of Lake Erie. Specifically, our legislation will exempt all riparian buffers in the Western Basin from property taxation. For those not already familiar, riparian buffers, as defined in HB 460, are strips of land between 35 and 100 feet in width that border a permanent body of water or wetlands. They must also consist entirely of naturally regenerated, seeded, or planted trees or perennial vegetation, and must not contain invasive plants or noxious weeds.

Extensive research has proven that riparian buffers are effective filters for nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium, potassium, sulfur, and magnesium. As you well know, excessive levels of nitrogen and phosphorus are of particular concern in the nation's streams and lakes due to their ability to cause harmful algal blooms. We believe our legislation will provide an incentive for all landowners in the Western Basin of Lake Erie to take land out of agricultural production and instead install riparian buffers.

In addition to their effectiveness in filtering nutrients in ground water, riparian buffers can act as critical habitat for various species of wildlife, especially those who have lost habitat due to the growing development of agricultural and commercial land. Installing riparian buffers can enhance migratory corridors, increase biodiversity, provide shade for both farm and wild animals, and even provide additional hunting opportunities. This is all in addition to their most important function: making our drinking water safer and Lake Erie cleaner.

Rep. Sheehy:

The latest in environmental news has Lake Erie front and center on the national stage. The U.S. EPA is no longer backing Ohio's decision to leave Lake Erie off of its list of impaired waters.

Many of you may remember that the state made this decision in order to maintain sovereignty over our own state policy, and in order to demonstrate to the nation that Ohioans can handle this crisis ourselves.

My friends, it's time to follow through.

For northwest Ohioans, environmental protection is more than just a philosophical debate, it's how we're defending our way of life. A water supply so polluted that it can't be used, economic stagnancy, and the crowding out of native species are all vivid and impending threats in my community.

The Governor and his administration have asked this legislature to act in defense of Lake Erie, and I can say with certainty that if we do not act, the federal government will. Of course, there is no singular silver bullet to end the harmful algal blooms Lake Erie has suffered through in the past decade. To do so will take years and many more pieces of this policy puzzle, but I'm in this for the long haul.

Representative Patterson and I introduce this legislation to give Ohioans an opportunity to aid this effort we all have a stake in, and we will be more than happy to answer any questions.